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FOLLOW-UP ON THE LETELIER CASE

The C.I.A.'s Link To Chile's Plot

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Almost six years after the assassination of Chilean exile leader Orlando Letelier in Washington, D.C., information continues to surface indicating that the Central Intelligence Agency concealed facts about its relations with DINA, the Chilean secret police, that might have helped solve the murder quickly.

In our earlier report [see "The Chilean Connection," *The Nation*, November 28, 1981], we showed that DINA's head, then-Col. Manuel Contreras, visited Washington secretly only days after he gave his agents orders to begin the assassination operation. Contreras made the trip to purchase weapons illegally from a company run by former C.I.A. officers Edwin Wilson and Frank Terpil.

New information from a year-old Congressional hearing—unnoticed at the time—reveals that Contreras had another meeting, this one with the second-ranking officer of the C.I.A., Deputy Director Vernon Walters. Walters told a March 10, 1981, hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs that he had two meetings with Contreras in Washington: one, previously publicized, in August 1975, the second "a year" later. An aide to Walters says that "every meeting" with Contreras involved "agency-to-agency business" and none took place after Walters's retirement from the C.I.A. on July 2, 1976.

We don't know the nature of the business, nor is there any evidence that Contreras told Walters of the Letelier assassination plot. But it is noteworthy that, according to F.B.I. investigators, Walters never told them about the second meeting with Contreras, even though its proximity to the assassination on September 21, 1976, made it particularly relevant to the investigation.

Walters's name has arisen several times in connection with Contreras and the DINA agents plotting the murder, according to the evidence compiled by the F.B.I. That evidence shows that Walters traveled to Asunción, Paraguay, in June 1976 on agency business. A month later, two DINA agents assigned to kill Letelier arrived in Paraguay to obtain false passports, using Walters's name and alleging that Walters and the C.I.A. knew about the DINA mission to Washington. Walters has denied he had anything to do with the DINA agents or the false passports.

Contreras's tance to hitherto head of the Par Guanes was the the two DINA agents were traveling Intelligence Agency and also purchased small arms." (Interestingly, Contreras's deal with Wilson and Terpil was for 1,059 Colt Cobra revolvers, a small handgun widely used by plainclothes police.) Guanes also said the two agents "had the cooperation of the C.I.A./U.S.A.," which "suggested that they travel with documents with another nationality since, as Chileans, it would be difficult to take such material out of the U.S.A." (Congress had prohibited arms sales to Chile earlier in 1976 because of human rights violations.)

Guanes portrayed Walters, whom he had met in Paraguay, as helping arrange the DINA agents' trip. He said he met U.S. Ambassador George Landau on August 6, 1976, at a Chinese Embassy reception: "[He] took us aside and said, 'I received a call from General Walters stating that problems had arisen with the passports given to the Chileans and that the State Department had cancelled the visas. It is possible for the same two to enter [the United States] directly using Chilean passports, for which they would make direct contact.' This information should be sent to my friend Colonel Contreras. . . ."

Because this account differs from Walters's denial and Landau's testimony about the reception, F.B.I. agents at first discounted it. They also assumed that because Guanes was a friend of Contreras he might have concocted the C.I.A. story to embarrass the United States. But in light of Walters's admission of a second meeting with Contreras, Guanes's testimony takes on new weight.

The Chilean government of Gen. Augusto Pinochet has stonewalled on the Letelier case, denying the U.S. request for Contreras's extradition, terminating the military and judicial investigations it had begun, and expelling from the country the attorney for the Letelier family, former Justice Minister Jaime Castillo.

Our new information indicates that the C.I.A., which had pledged to cooperate with F.B.I. investigators, has joined in that stonewalling. The C.I.A. and General Walters had full information about the incidents in Paraguay, including photographs of the two DINA agents, within days of their occurrence. The information was never turned over to the F.B.I. Its importance is indicated by the fact that when the photographs and cable traffic about the incidents were unearthed by Federal investigators more than a year later, they led to the arrest of DINA agent Michael Townley, who confessed to having been involved in the plot, and to the indictments of Contreras and two other DINA officials.